

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1180

To assure that development of certain Federal oil and gas resources will occur in ways that protect water resources and respect the rights of the surface owners, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 16, 2007

Mr. UDALL of Colorado introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To assure that development of certain Federal oil and gas resources will occur in ways that protect water resources and respect the rights of the surface owners, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; FINDINGS; PURPOSE.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Western Waters and Farm Lands Protection Act”.

6 (b) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds the following:

7 (1) Domestic oil and gas resources, including
8 coalbed methane, are an important part of the Na-

1 tion's energy supply portfolio and their development
2 in appropriate locations and in appropriate ways can
3 help reduce dependence on imported energy supplies.

4 (2) In many areas of the Western United
5 States, federally owned minerals, including oil and
6 gas, are in lands where the surface estate belongs to
7 non-Federal parties whose interests can be adversely
8 affected if the development of the minerals is not
9 done in an appropriate manner.

10 (3) Development of oil and gas—and especially
11 coalbed methane—often involves removal of a sig-
12 nificant volume of groundwater.

13 (4) Some of the water extracted in connection
14 with this development is reinjected into the ground,
15 while some is retained in surface holding ponds or
16 released on the surface and allowed to flow into
17 streams or other waterbodies, including ditches used
18 for irrigation.

19 (5) The quality of these extracted waters varies
20 from one location to another. Some of these waters
21 are of good quality, but they often contain dissolved
22 minerals (such as sodium, magnesium, arsenic, or
23 selenium) that can contaminate other waters as a re-
24 sult of leaks or leaching from holding ponds or dis-
25 charge of extracted waters. In addition, extracted

1 waters often have other characteristics, such as high
2 acidity and temperature, that can adversely affect
3 agricultural uses of land or the quality of the envi-
4 ronment.

5 (6) Clearer requirements for proper disposal of
6 these extracted waters is necessary in order to avoid
7 adverse effects on the quality of ground and surface
8 waters as well as the productivity of surrounding ag-
9 ricultural lands.

10 (7) To reduce the chance of potential harm to
11 water supplies, agricultural production, and the envi-
12 ronment that otherwise could result from disposal of
13 water extracted in connection with coalbed methane
14 development or the development of other oil or gas
15 resources, the Congress should act to ensure that
16 such disposal is subject to regulation under the Fed-
17 eral Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et
18 seq.) and the Mineral Leasing Act (30 U.S.C. 181
19 et seq.).

20 (8) Under the Stock-Raising Homestead Act
21 (43 U.S.C. 291 et seq.) and other laws, the Federal
22 Government has transferred to other parties the sur-
23 face estate in millions of acres in Western States
24 where ownership of coal, oil, gas, and other minerals
25 has been retained by the Federal Government.

1 (9) Under current Federal law, the leasing of
2 federally owned coal on lands where the surface es-
3 tate is not owned by the United States is subject to
4 the consent of the surface estate owners, but neither
5 this consent requirement nor the operating and
6 bonding requirements applicable to development of
7 federally owned locatable minerals applies to the
8 leasing or development of oil or gas in similar split-
9 estate situations.

10 (10) To better balance the need for develop-
11 ment of oil and gas resources (including coalbed
12 methane) with the rights and interests of the owners
13 of the surface estate of affected lands, current law
14 should be revised so as to increase the involvement
15 of the surface estate owners in developing and imple-
16 menting plans for such development and to provide
17 clearer and more adequate standards for such devel-
18 opment.

19 (c) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to provide
20 for the protection of water resources and the rights of sur-
21 face estate owners in the development of oil and gas re-
22 sources, including coalbed methane.

1 **TITLE I—PROTECTION OF**
2 **WATER RESOURCES**

3 **SEC. 101. MINERAL LEASING ACT REQUIREMENTS.**

4 Section 17 of the Mineral Leasing Act (30 U.S.C.
5 226) is amended by adding at the end the following:

6 “(p) WATER REQUIREMENTS.—

7 “(1) An operator producing oil or gas (includ-
8 ing coalbed methane) under a lease issued under this
9 Act shall—

10 “(A) replace the water supply of a water
11 user who obtains all or part of such user’s sup-
12 ply of water for domestic, agricultural, or other
13 purposes from an underground or surface
14 source that has been affected by contamination,
15 diminution, or interruption proximately result-
16 ing from drilling operations for such produc-
17 tion; and

18 “(B) comply with all applicable require-
19 ments of Federal and State law for discharge of
20 any water produced under the lease.

21 “(2) An application for a lease under this sub-
22 section shall be accompanied by a proposed water
23 management plan including provisions to—

24 “(A) protect the quantity and quality of
25 surface and ground water systems, both on-site

1 and off-site, from adverse effects of the explo-
2 ration, development, and reclamation processes
3 or to provide alternative sources of water if
4 such protection cannot be assured;

5 “(B) protect the rights of present users of
6 water that would be affected by operations
7 under the lease, including the discharge of any
8 water produced in connection with such oper-
9 ations that is not reinjected; and

10 “(C) identify any agreements with other
11 parties for the beneficial use of produced waters
12 and the steps that will be taken to comply with
13 State and Federal laws related to such use.”.

14 **SEC. 102. RELATION TO STATE LAW.**

15 Nothing in this Act or any amendment made by this
16 Act shall—

17 (1) be construed as impairing or in any manner
18 affecting any right or jurisdiction of any State with
19 respect to the waters of such State; or

20 (2) be construed as limiting, altering, modi-
21 fying, or amending any of the interstate compacts or
22 equitable apportionment decrees that apportion
23 water among and between States.

TITLE II—SURFACE OWNER PROTECTION

SEC. 201. DEFINITIONS.

As used in this title—

(1) the term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Interior;

(2) the term “lease” means a lease issued by the Secretary under the Mineral Leasing Act (30 U.S.C. 181 et seq.) or any other law, providing for development of oil and gas resources (including coal-bed methane) owned by the United States;

(3) the term “lessee” means the holder of a lease; and

(4) the term “operator” means any person that is responsible under the terms and conditions of a lease for the operations conducted on leased lands or any portion thereof.

SEC. 202. POST-LEASE SURFACE USE AGREEMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in section 203, the Secretary may not authorize any operator to conduct exploration and drilling operations on lands with respect to which title to oil and gas resources is held by the United States but title to the surface estate is not held by the United States, until the operator has filed with the Secretary a document, signed by the operator and the surface

1 owner or owners, showing that the operator has secured
2 a written surface use agreement between the operator and
3 the surface owner or owners that meets the requirements
4 of subsection (b).

5 (b) CONTENTS.—The surface use agreement shall
6 provide for—

7 (1) the use of only such portion of the surface
8 estate as is reasonably necessary for exploration and
9 drilling operations based on site-specific conditions;

10 (2) the accommodation of the surface estate
11 owner to the maximum extent practicable, including
12 the location, use, timing, and type of exploration and
13 drilling operations, consistent with the operator's
14 right to develop the oil and gas estate;

15 (3) the reclamation of the site to a condition ca-
16 pable of supporting the uses which such lands were
17 capable of supporting prior to exploration and drill-
18 ing operations; and

19 (4) compensation for damages as a result of ex-
20 ploration and drilling operations, including but not
21 limited to—

22 (A) loss of income and increased costs in-
23 curred;

1 (B) damage to or destruction of personal
2 property, including crops, forage, and livestock;
3 and

4 (C) failure to reclaim the site in accord-
5 ance with this paragraph (3).

6 (c) PROCEDURE.—(1) An operator shall notify the
7 surface estate owner or owners of the operator's desire to
8 conclude an agreement under this section. If the surface
9 estate owner and the operator do not reach an agreement
10 within 90 days after the operator has provided such notice,
11 the matter shall be referred to third party arbitration for
12 resolution within a period of 90 days. The cost of such
13 arbitration shall be the responsibility of the operator.

14 (2) The Secretary shall identify persons with experi-
15 ence in conducting arbitrations and shall make this infor-
16 mation available to operators.

17 (3) Referral of a matter for arbitration by a person
18 identified by the Secretary pursuant to paragraph (2)
19 shall be sufficient to constitute compliance with paragraph
20 (1).

21 (d) ATTORNEYS FEES.—If action is taken to enforce
22 or interpret any of the terms and conditions contained in
23 a surface use agreement, the prevailing party shall be re-
24 imbursed by the other party for reasonable attorneys fees

1 and actual costs incurred, in addition to any other relief
2 which a court or arbitration panel may grant.

3 **SEC. 203. AUTHORIZED EXPLORATION AND DRILLING OP-**
4 **ERATIONS.**

5 (a) AUTHORIZATION WITHOUT SURFACE USE
6 AGREEMENT.—The Secretary may authorize an operator
7 to conduct exploration and drilling operations on lands
8 covered by section 202 in the absence of an agreement
9 with the surface estate owner or owners, if—

10 (1) the Secretary makes a determination in
11 writing that the operator made a good faith attempt
12 to conclude such an agreement, including referral of
13 the matter to arbitration pursuant to section 202(c),
14 but that no agreement was concluded within 90 days
15 after the referral to arbitration;

16 (2) the operator submits a plan of operations
17 that provides for the matters specified in section
18 202(b) and for compliance with all other applicable
19 requirements of Federal and State law; and

20 (3) the operator posts a bond or other financial
21 assurance in an amount the Secretary determines to
22 be adequate to ensure compensation to the surface
23 estate owner for any damages to the site, in the
24 form of a surety bond, trust fund, letter of credit,

1 government security, certificate of deposit, cash, or
2 equivalent.

3 (b) SURFACE OWNER PARTICIPATION.—The Sec-
4 retary shall provide surface estate owners with an oppor-
5 tunity to—

6 (1) comment on plans of operations in advance
7 of a determination of compliance with this title;

8 (2) participate in bond level determinations and
9 bond release proceedings under this section;

10 (3) attend an on-site inspection during such de-
11 terminations and proceedings;

12 (4) file written objections to a proposed bond
13 release; and

14 (5) request and participate in an on-site inspec-
15 tion when they have reason to believe there is a vio-
16 lation of the terms and conditions of a plan of oper-
17 ations.

18 (c) PAYMENT OF FINANCIAL GUARANTEE.—A sur-
19 face estate owner with respect to any land subject to a
20 lease may petition the Secretary for payment of all or any
21 portion of a bond or other financial assurance required
22 under this section as compensation for any damages as
23 a result of exploration and drilling operations. Pursuant
24 to such a petition, the Secretary may use such bond or

1 other guarantee to provide compensation to the surface
2 estate owner for such damages.

3 (d) BOND RELEASE.—Upon request and after inspec-
4 tion and opportunity for surface estate owner review, the
5 Secretary may release the financial assurance required
6 under this section if the Secretary determines that explo-
7 ration and drilling operations are ended and all damages
8 have been fully compensated.

9 **SEC. 204. SURFACE OWNER NOTIFICATION.**

10 The Secretary shall—

11 (1) notify surface estate owners in writing at
12 least 45 days in advance of lease sales;

13 (2) within ten working days after a lease is
14 issued, notify surface estate owners of regarding the
15 identity of the lessee;

16 (3) notify surface estate owners in writing con-
17 cerning any subsequent decisions regarding a lease,
18 such as modifying or waiving stipulations and ap-
19 proving rights of way; and

20 (4) notify surface estate owners within five
21 business days after issuance of a drilling permit
22 under a lease.

1 **TITLE III—RECLAMATION AND**
2 **BONDING**

3 **SEC. 301. RECLAMATION STANDARD AND BOND.**

4 Section 17 of the Mineral Leasing Act (30 U.S.C.
5 226) is amended by adding at the end the following:

6 “(p) RECLAMATION REQUIREMENTS.—An operator
7 producing oil or gas (including coalbed methane) under
8 a lease issued pursuant to this Act shall—

9 “(1) at a minimum restore the land affected to
10 a condition capable of supporting the uses that it
11 was capable of supporting prior to any drilling, or
12 higher or better uses of which there is reasonable
13 likelihood, so long as such use or uses do not present
14 any actual or probable hazard to public health or
15 safety or pose any actual or probable threat of water
16 diminution or pollution, and the permit applicants’
17 declared proposed land use following reclamation is
18 not impractical or unreasonable, inconsistent with
19 applicable land use policies and plans, or involve un-
20 reasonable delay in implementation, or is violative of
21 Federal, State, or local law;

22 “(2) ensure that all reclamation efforts proceed
23 in an environmentally sound manner and as contem-
24 poraneously as practicable with the oil and gas drill-
25 ing operations; and

1 “(3) submit with the plan of operations a rec-
2 lamation plan that describes in detail the methods
3 and practices that will be used to ensure complete
4 and timely restoration of all lands affected by oil
5 and gas operations.

6 “(q) RECLAMATION BOND.—An operator producing
7 oil or gas (including coalbed methane) under a lease issued
8 under this Act shall post a bond that covers that area of
9 land within the permit area upon which the operator will
10 initiate and conduct oil and gas drilling and reclamation
11 operations within the initial term of the permit. As suc-
12 ceeding increments of oil and gas drilling and reclamation
13 operations are to be initiated and conducted within the
14 permit area, the lessee shall file with the regulatory au-
15 thority an additional bond or bonds to cover such incre-
16 ments in accordance with this section. The amount of the
17 bond required for each bonded area shall depend upon the
18 reclamation requirements of the approved permit; shall re-
19 flect the probable difficulty of reclamation giving consider-
20 ation to such factors as topography, geology of the site,
21 hydrology, and revegetation potential; and shall be deter-
22 mined by the Secretary. The amount of the bond shall be
23 sufficient to assure the completion of the reclamation plan
24 if the work had to be performed by the Secretary in the
25 event of forfeiture.

1 “(r) REGULATIONS.—No later than one year after
2 the date of the enactment of this subsection, the Secretary
3 shall promulgate regulations to implement the require-
4 ments of subsections (p) and (q).

5 “(s) STUDY BY THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OF-
6 FICE.—(1) The Comptroller General shall conduct a re-
7 view to assess the adequacy of the regulations issued by
8 the Secretary pursuant to subsection (r) to ensure that
9 operators will meet the requirements of subsection (p).

10 “(2) A report of the results of the review required
11 by paragraph (1) shall be transmitted to the Committee
12 on Resources of the House of Representatives and the
13 Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Sen-
14 ate no later than 180 days after the date on which the
15 Secretary promulgates regulations pursuant to subsection
16 (r).

17 “(3) The report required by paragraph (2) shall in-
18 clude findings and conclusions by the Comptroller General
19 of the United States, and any recommendations the Comp-
20 troller General may make with respect to any legislation
21 or administrative actions the Comptroller General deter-
22 mines would be appropriate to ensure compliance with the
23 requirements of subsection (p).”.

1 **TITLE IV—ABANDONED WELLS**

2 **SEC. 401. DEFINITION.**

3 As used in this title, the term “abandoned well”
4 means any well drilled for the purpose of exploring for
5 or developing oil or gas resources (including coalbed meth-
6 ane) that—

7 (1) has not been in operation for a period of 12
8 continuous months, unless the owner or operator has
9 notified the Secretary of the Interior (for wells
10 drilled to explore for or develop minerals owned by
11 the United States) or the relevant State regulatory
12 agency (for wells drilled to explore for or develop
13 minerals not owned by the United States) that the
14 well has been temporarily shut down; or

15 (2) has not been operative for more than 60
16 continuous months after the owner or operator has
17 notified the Secretary of the Interior (for wells
18 drilled to explore for or develop minerals owned by
19 the United States) or the relevant State regulatory
20 agency (for wells drilled to explore for or develop
21 minerals not owned by the United States) that the
22 well has been temporarily shut down.

23 **SEC. 402. FEDERAL REMEDIATION PROGRAM.**

24 (a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—(1) The Sec-
25 retary of the Interior, in cooperation with the Secretary

1 of Agriculture, shall establish a program to ensure to the
2 maximum extent feasible the remediation, reclamation,
3 and closure of abandoned wells that—

4 (A) are located on lands administered by an
5 agency of the Department of the Interior or the For-
6 est Service; or

7 (B) were drilled to explore for or develop min-
8 erals owned by the United States located on lands
9 with respect to which the surface estate is not owned
10 by the United States.

11 (2) In implementing the program, the Secretary of
12 the Interior—

13 (A) shall cooperate with the Secretary of Agri-
14 culture and the States with respect to the Federal
15 lands covered by the program are located; and

16 (B) shall consult with the Secretary of Energy
17 and the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commis-
18 sion.

19 (3) The Secretary of the Interior shall establish the
20 program by no later than 3 years after the date of enact-
21 ment of this section.

22 (b) PROGRAM ELEMENTS.—The program established
23 under subsection (a) shall—

24 (1) provide for identification of abandoned wells
25 to be covered by the program;

1 (2) establish a means of ranking critical sites
2 for priority in remediation based on potential envi-
3 ronmental harm, other land use priorities, and pub-
4 lic health and safety; and

5 (3) provide as far as possible for identifying any
6 lessees or other persons responsible for abandoned
7 wells, and for recovering the costs of remediation to
8 the maximum extent feasible.

9 (c) PLAN.—Within 6 months after the date of enact-
10 ment of this section, the Secretary of the Interior, in co-
11 operation with the Secretary of Agriculture, shall prepare
12 a plan for implementing the program established under
13 subsection (a). A copy of the plan shall be transmitted
14 to the Committee on Resources of the House of Represent-
15 atives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Re-
16 sources of the Senate.

17 (d) REVIEW AND REPORT.—(1) No later than 3 years
18 after the date of enactment of this section, the Secretary
19 of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agri-
20 culture, shall complete a review of the status of remedi-
21 ation, reclamation, and closure actions under the program.

22 (2) Upon completion of the review required by para-
23 graph (1), the Secretary of the Interior shall provide to
24 the Committee on Resources of the House of Representa-

1 tives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Re-
2 sources of the Senate—

3 (A) a report on the results of the review;

4 (B) information regarding any wells on lands
5 covered by the program that have been abandoned
6 since the date of enactment of this section; and

7 (C) any recommendations the Secretary may
8 choose to make regarding legislative or administra-
9 tion steps to further the purposes for which the pro-
10 gram was established.

11 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
12 are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of the
13 Interior \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2008 through
14 2009 to carry out this section.

15 **SEC. 403. ASSISTANCE TO STATES AND TRIBES.**

16 (a) STATE PROGRAM.—The Secretary of the Interior,
17 in consultation with the Secretary of Energy, shall estab-
18 lish a program to provide technical assistance to facilitate
19 State efforts to develop and implement practical and eco-
20 nomical remedies for environmental problems caused by
21 abandoned wells on lands that are not owned by the
22 United States. The Secretary shall work with the States,
23 through the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission,
24 to assist the States in quantifying and mitigating environ-

1 mental risks of onshore abandoned wells on State and pri-
2 vate lands.

3 (b) TRIBAL PROGRAM.—The Secretary of the Inte-
4 rior, in consultation with the Secretary of Energy, shall
5 establish a program to provide technical assistance to fa-
6 cilitate efforts by Indian tribes to develop and implement
7 practical and economical remedies for environmental prob-
8 lems caused by abandoned wells on Indian lands, including
9 lands held in trust by the United States.

10 (c) PROGRAM ELEMENTS.—So far as possible, the
11 programs established under this section shall include—

12 (1) mechanisms to facilitate identification of re-
13 sponsible parties;

14 (2) criteria for ranking critical sites based on
15 factors such as other land use priorities, potential
16 environmental harm and public visibility; and

17 (3) information and training programs regard-
18 ing best practices for remediation of different types
19 of sites.

20 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
21 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of the Inte-
22 rior for activities under this section \$5,000,000 for each
23 of fiscal years 2008 through 2009.

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